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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses two conferences that focus on readership and authorship in an attempt to make reading and writing more significant in the lives of young people. The Arizona Young Authors Conference provides a wide range of opportunities for students to write and to begin to realize their potential as young writers. Participating children, from kindergarten through eighth-grade, represent their schools and include a variety of academic, socioeconomic, linguistic, racial, and ethnic groups. The Young Readers Award stimulates the interest of children and youth in reading literature. The children read, or are read, at least 5 of 20 selected books and vote on their favorite, to express their appreciation to authors who write in a manner which appeals directly to them. Many persons in schools, libraries, universities, and homes are involved in these conferences and are working together with a common goal of encouraging reading and writing by all children in the school/library community. (MB)

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ENCOURAGING YOUNG AUTHORS AND YOUNG READERS

by

Y. Goodman, V. Cox, V. Milz, and M. Haussler

Many educators, linguists, and psychologists are aware that when students read, they learn to read, and when they write, they learn to write. At a time when the public is clamoring for quality in the literacy of young people, these experts agree that the greatest support for developing a high quality of literacy is for students to be involved in reading and writing activities that are significant and functional in their own personal and social lives. When young people are excited about reading and writing activities which are relevant to their daily lives, they do not have to continually focus on tedious skill exercises to increase their proficiency.

It is with the purpose of making reading and writing significant to the lives of young people that schoolwide, districtwide, and statewide conferences have been developed. In preparation for these conferences where readership and authorship are the focus, teachers are amazed at the excitement and quality of work generated by students. The descriptions which follow focus on two different conferences: The Young Authors Conference and the Young Readers Award, a two-year cyclic program developed at the University of Arizona, College of Education in Tucson, Arizona. Each conference is described in such a way that another community will be able to set up their own program.

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Major Purpose

To provide a wide range of opportunities for students to write. Although the Young Authors Conference recognizes the talents of a select group of young persons, it seeks to motivate and encourage a variety of writing by all children in the classroom and at home.

Overview

The Arizona Young Authors Conference of 1976 brought to a central location hundreds of children of kindergarten to eighth-grade age levels. The children represented their local schools, and included a wide variety of academic, socio-economic, linguistic, racial and ethnic groups. On the Conference day, they brought copies of their own-authored books to be shared with a group of young authors of a similar age. They attended a small group seminar to stimulate additional writing, ate lunch with fellow writers from other school districts in the state and listened to an exciting professional author, Bill Martin, Jr., talk about writing.

The Young Authors Conference is the culmination of a year of careful preparation and planning. Key personnel from local school districts, libraries, and the university faculty serve on a Permanent Coordinating Committee, which is the organizing body for both the Young Authors Conference and the Young Readers Award. During the year of working on the Young Authors Conference,

the Committee is concerned with the following responsibilities:

1. Determine a calendar of events to implement the Young Authors Conference concept.
2. Establish necessary policies and financial support.
3. Plan and organize the conference day. Select the main speaker.
4. Develop and carry through in-service programs.
5. Plan publicity in newspapers, radio, and T.V.
6. Involve undergraduate students from the university.
7. Select personnel to staff the conference.
8. Organize transportation to the conference for children and teachers.

Activity at the Local Area - School or District

When each school and district is notified of the spring Young Authors Conference, they are encouraged to hold a local conference as a preliminary to the statewide conference in order to involve every child. To accomplish this goal, in-service workshops are available for any participating teachers or administrators led by knowledgeable teachers, librarians or university personnel. The workshop participants are actually involved themselves in suggested classroom experiences and are provided with a large number of practical ideas:

1. How to stimulate writing through a variety of activities and ideas.
2. How to develop the self-editing process in children.
3. How to make a book from scrap materials.

Competition between children is discouraged by finding ways to display every child's book and to share them with others in

the classroom, school, or local community. The children in each class or each grade level choose a representative --- not necessarily a best writer ---to le part of the district and then the state-wide conference. The representative's purpose is to return to the class with ideas which will generate more writing, rather than to receive a prize, and have the feeling that the conference is a personal culminating activity. The focus is constantly on the process not simply the product.

Limitations are not placed on what and how children write. Many alternatives are acceptable at the Young Authors Conference. Children are allowed to share authorships, or to be part of an illustrator-author team. Children may illustrate their books in any media. Books of commentary, poetry, and non-fiction can be brought. Children who write in a language other than English are permitted to share their writing in that language. Representative young authors even may bring the writings of students other than their own to share with conference participants at the statewide conference.

The children's books should be duplicated so that no student is ever asked to part with a treasured manuscript. Student-authored books are a valuable resource from the classroom to the university level. Some schools catalogue the children's books, and make them part of the regular circulating collection. The University of Arizona asks that a duplicate be made for its collection. The books are a valuable aid in introducing university

students or language researchers to children's writing.

Activity at the State Level

While the local school and district conferences are taking place, the planning for the state conference begins. After the conference date has been set, much behind-the-scenes work must be done. A large number of children can be accommodated if every detail is planned carefully.

The conference day is organized around three major aspects:

1. A session to share the self-authored book
2. A creative writing session
3. A listening session led by a professional author

The day is divided into four sections of time for each child. Three of the sections are organized around the sessions just listed, and a fourth time slot is set aside for lunch and relaxation. These sessions are led by three different groups of adults. The Book-Sharing sessions are led by a group of teachers who can help children feel comfortable quickly so they will be at ease in reading to each other and discussing each others books. The Creative Writing sessions are led by persons who are good motivators of writing and have many exciting ideas which children start working on at the conference and take back to their schools to stimulate continuous writing. A third group of adults, who could be parents or teachers-in-training, are used to stay with the same group of children during all the activities as well

as through the lunch period. They direct children between rooms, and provide the children with the continuity of an adult to help them feel secure during this new and exciting experience. These people must keep the children in a group, and must know the physical facilities well so that children are moved with ease. The group leaders for the Book-Sharing and Creative Writing sessions can repeat the same activity with several groups. One large session which might accommodate one-third to one-half of the children at one time is planned with a prominent author whose name is familiar to the children.

The Creative Writing and Book-Sharing sessions should be small in size, and should range from 12 to 15 children. For children aged 5-12 each of these sessions should be no longer than one hour in length. For older children a session of an hour and a half is more appropriate. Groups can be organized to constitute a two or three year age span. Students can be assigned from registrants across the state when determining a group's membership, but it is helpful if at least one other child from the same school is a member of the group. This provides both the security of someone known while at the same time gives a broad opportunity to make new friends.

General Procedure

The following procedures are part of the year of preparation for the Young Authors Conference:

1. A publicity brochure is prepared and distributed which announces and stimulates interest in a Young Authors

Conference, and allows teachers to write for an information brochure.

2. An information brochure is developed to explain: Procedures for the local conferences; the help the Permanent Committee can provide; how a local teacher can obtain help; and how the statewide conference will be organized.

3. Registration for the statewide conference is mailed out early with a firm deadline date at least a month before the actual conference.

4. As the registrations are received, each child is assigned to a small group of children of similar age. Confirmations are sent out to each school. This packet with the confirmations includes:

    a. Badges for each participant with names in large letters. Room assignments for each session can be written on the badge. The badges can be color-coded for age groups.

    b. Maps of the conference site with the building and room numbers labeled.

    c. Instructions detailing the procedures to follow on the day of the conference.

    It is important for the children to know as much as possible about what to expect at the conference. Teachers should be instructed to carefully specify meeting times and places before, during, and after the conference.

5. A packet is developed for each leader who is responsible for organizing and staying with the same group of children throughout the conference. This packet is picked up the

day of the conference, and includes:

a. Programs for the day.

b. Certificates of participation for each child. The certificate should focus on the participation of all the young authors in the school as represented by the child attending the conference.

c. Evaluation sheet. Each child is asked to fill out the evaluation to help in planning the next conference.

6. A confirmation letter is sent to each adult leader. A meeting is held with adult leaders to explain their services, answer any questions, and provide them with badges, programs, and maps of the site.

The careful planning of the conference together with meetings held prior to the conference with group leaders, teachers, and librarians provide the opportunity for a most successful conference day.

ARIZONA YOUNG READERS AWARD

Major purpose

To stimulate the interest of children and youth in reading literature written especially for them. The Arizona Young Readers Award allows children to nominate and vote for their favorite book, and identify them for others to read. As students choose their favorite book, the motivation is provided to encourage the development of life-long reading interests.

Overview

The Arizona Young Readers Award of 1977 was given to Judy Blume, author of the winning Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing. The pre-

sentation ceremony was held at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona. A carload of children from each participating school was invited to see Ms. Blume receive the award. She spoke to the assembled group, and afterward autographed copies of her books that children brought to the ceremony. A video tape was made of the proceedings to be duplicated and shown in schools across the state of Arizona.

The Permanent Coordinating Committee, whose membership represents the statewide contacts mentioned earlier, is responsible for the Arizona Young Readers Award in the years alternate to the Young Authors Conference. As the Committee turns its attention to the Young Readers Award, it is concerned with the following duties:

1. Determine a calendar of events to implement the Young Readers Award concept.
2. Establish necessary procedures and financial support.
3. Compile the nominated books for the AYRA.
4. Plan publicity in newspapers, radio, and T.V.
5. Determine any in-service needs.
6. Disseminate information to schools and libraries.
7. Count returned ballots and determine winner.
8. Compile list of nominated books for the next award.

Activities at the Local and State Levels

Arizona Young Readers Award titles are compiled from a list of books suggested by children all over the state. Twenty of the favorite books are selected for the list. All book selections

are based on the following criteria:

1. Caldecott or Newberry Award winners are not eligible.
2. Only one title of any one author will be included.
3. Titles published in the five years preceding the current year are eligible.
4. Non-fiction will not be considered.
5. Titles must be in print.
6. Authors on preceding lists may be repeated but not the particular title.
7. The winning author of any one year is excluded from participation the following year.
8. The authors selected should be living authors so there is a greater possibility they will visit the site to accept the Award.

Even as the book list is being compiled, decisions are made about the day the Award is to be presented. The Committee must decide how to involve children in the award ceremony, who is to present the award, and what the award itself will be.

Information is then disseminated through libraries, schools, and professional organizations so local planning and book purchasing can begin. Several thousand information packets are mailed throughout the state which include: the list of titles; deadline dates; list of rules and policies; and a copy of the ballot with a place for nominations on the reverse side. To participate in the Arizona Young Readers Award, schools and public libraries must agree to the following:

1. Acquisition of 12 of the 20 selected books.
2. Stimulation of interest in the award.

3. Require children to read or have read to them a minimum of 5 of these books, in order to vote.

4. Reproduce ballots for each child to vote.

5. Tally the votes.

6. Have each child nominate five new favorite fiction titles on the back of the ballot to be used for the next award book list.

7. Tally and compile a list of the five favorite books in rank order.

8. Mail ballots and tally sheets by designated date.

Individual classrooms, schools, or public libraries are encouraged to set aside periods of time to read and discuss the nominated books. Teachers are encouraged to see the significance of uninterrupted sustained silent reading. Local schools and libraries are encouraged to present their own award to a favorite author and write their congratulations to the winner. The goal of stimulating the development of life-long reading interests can be met at this level of participation.

Procedures

Implementation of the following procedures take place during the year preceding the Young Readers Award:

1. Announcements are made to all people responsible for purchasing books. Plenty of time must be allowed to order books.

2. Booklists and sample ballots are mailed to interested teachers and librarians.

3. Newspaper and television publicity is sought to interest

young readers and their librarians, teachers, and parents. Continued publicity includes:

a. Meetings to share selected books with teachers and librarians.

b. Announcements at State Reading Council and Teachers of English Meetings.

c. Displays at State Librarians Association Meetings and other professional meetings.

d. Notifying bookstores which carry children's books of the nominated books and encouraging them to set up displays.

e. Distribution of information through educational newsletters, librarian newsletters, and other publications.

4. Letters are sent to the publisher of each of the twenty nominated books asking for travel support for the winning author. It is important to keep in mind that the winning author may not be able to attend, and alternative plans may need to be made.

5. Arrangements are made for the Award Ceremony. In Arizona, the award is presented in association with an on-going Book Fair sponsored by the University Library Science and English Departments. Displays are available by professional publishers of children's books, and by local library and university personnel.

6. Ballots are returned to the University. Members of the Permanent Coordinating Committee count the ballots which reveal the favorite author of the young readers.

7. The reverse side of the ballots are tabulated to reveal the twenty child-selected books nominated for the next Young Readers Award.

8. The winning author is notified, and invited to accept the award.
9. Arrangements are made to house and entertain the author, if the invitation is accepted.
10. Contact is made with the Governor or other public figures to present the Award.
11. Public announcement of the Award is made at the Award Ceremony and Book Fair. The proceedings are video-taped, so children all over the state may see the winning author.
12. Finally, the announcement of the 20 child-selected titles for the next Award is made.

IMPLICATIONS

The Young Authors Conference/Young Readers Award Program serves as a catalyst in the community. The Young Authors Conference provides thousands of children both opportunity and purpose to write for many months, and to begin to realize their potential as young writers. The Young Readers Award keeps children interacting with literature, as they are able to express their appreciation to authors who write in a manner which appeals directly to them. Many persons in schools, libraries, universities, and homes are involved in the process, and are working together with a common goal of encouraging reading and writing by <u>all</u> children in the school-library community.